THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM: MAKING YOUTUBE VIDEOS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' LEARNING

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Abstract: The article introduces the notion of the flipped classroom, focusing on the benefits it can bring into the English language classroom. It presents the preliminary results of a small scale study on the way grammar topics can be covered when the flipped model is applied at the practical course of English with first year university students. The topic needs further investigation as it seems premature to clearly state the benefits of flipping the language classroom. Yet, it can be said that applying such a model can contribute to the development of learner autonomy as well as HOTs.
Keywords: flipped classroom, student-centred classroom, learner autonomy, HOTs

> *Learners must no longer sit there and expect to be taught; teachers must no longer stand up there teaching all the time. Teachers have to learn to let go and learners have to learn to take hold.*
> Brian Page

One of the topical issues of the Moldovan education context is the educators' lack of proper preparation to help learners develop the 21st century skills, thus equipping them with 'the necessary skills to be able to reason, question and judge the value of the received information' (Condrat 2018: 238). The traditional teacher-centred approach still appears to dominate the EFL classroom, where learners are viewed as mere recipients of the knowledge a teacher has planned to transmit.

Instead of scaffolding the learning process, teachers prefer to rely on more concrete patterns where learners are expected to learn and act according to a well-prescribed pattern where there is no room for critical thinking and creativity. Teachers might erroneously think that a student-centred approach can results in 'anarchy' (Condrat 2014),

something which has been proven to be wrong in the language education process (Brown 2001; Jones 2007; Lamb 2008; Scharle, Szabo 2000).

Learner autonomy should be a key concept in language education in present. Enabling the students to take responsibility for their own learning will inevitably lead to the development of higher order thinking skills (hereafter, HOTs). Becoming responsible learners means to "accept the idea that their own efforts are crucial to progress learning, and behave accordingly" (Scharle, Szabo 2000: 3). To help students become autonomous learners, teachers should bear in mind that "in the traditional teaching-learning context, learner autonomy can only develop in an atmosphere in which both teachers and learners are sensitive to the mutual influences at play" (Lamb 2008: 7).

This can be achieved when both teachers and students engage in a constructive dialogue and make reasonable decisions regarding the language education process. When all the participants are involved in such a process, the learning can be considered as successful. Moreover, enabling the learners to actively participate in decision making and taking responsibility for their own learning will also contribute the development of HOTs.

HOTs are the skills that enable the learners to judge the value of truth, to transfer the acquired knowledge to new contexts, to solve problems and to think critically. Traditionally they are positioned at the upper part of Bloom's taxonomy (Figure 1) (https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/). The distribution of skills goes from basic skills towards more complex, at its base there are the skills of recalling facts and basic concepts, whereas, on top there are more complex skills, such as analysing, evaluating, and creating.

Figure 4: Bloom's taxonomy
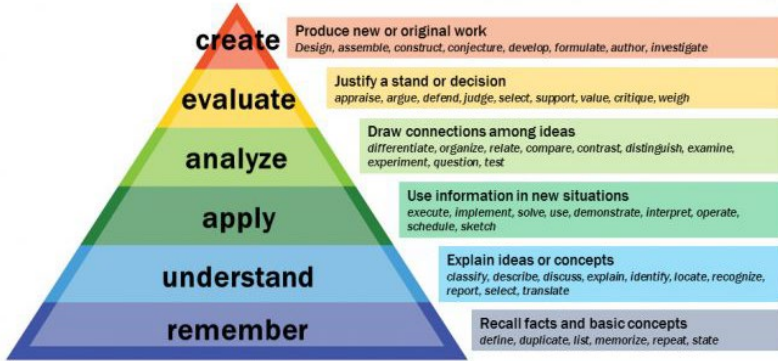
The traditional classroom is believed to little contribute to the development of HOTs. The made observations have shown that teachers seem to do most of the talk leaving little space for the actual learning to take place in the classroom. Learners seldom manage to develop such skills as critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity at the lesson of English. The overall skill development in a traditional EFL classroom is presented in Figure 2.

*Figure 5: Skill development in a traditional classroom*
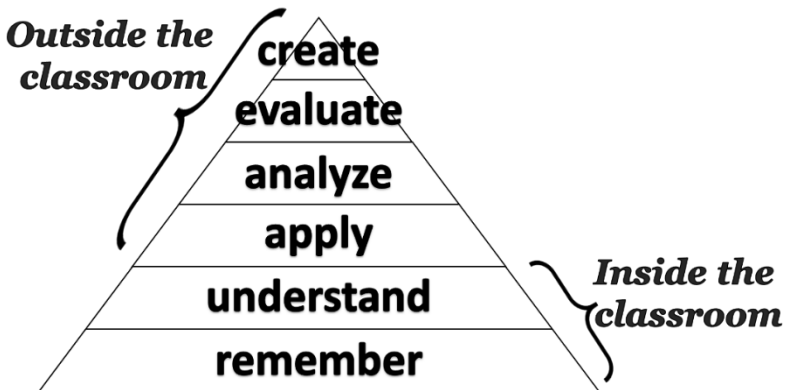
As seen, learners are generally expected to develop HOTs outside the classroom. The classroom time is mostly devoted to the development of such lower thinking skills as remembering and understanding. Undeniably, such skills are crucial in the process of

language education (Condrat 2018: 238). Yet, in a student-centred classroom promoting learner autonomy the focus should be on the development of HOTs as well.

Another important aspect to be mentioned here is the way technology should be integrated in the language education process. Technological development has tremendously impacted people's lives, thus teachers should consider integrating technology in their education process in order to create more motivational learning environments, on the one hand, and to boost learner autonomy, on the other. Thus, technology should facilitate the dialogue between teachers and learners who should engage in a process of negotiating and co-constructing the meaning of what is to be learned and what skills are to be developed.

Educators started looking for viable solutions of technology integration that would flip the way skills are developed in a traditional classroom. The idea of flipping the classroom was introduced by two chemistry teachers, Bergmann and Sams (2012), who incidentally discovered the benefits of inverting the typical cycle of content acquisition and application. Such an inversion means the learners are expected to gain the necessary knowledge before the class (i.e. remember and understand) and apply it during the class (i.e. apply, analyse, evaluate, and create). Definitely, the classroom learning should proceed in an interactive way, where the teacher only assists the learners in the process, which means that learners become more responsible for their own learning and are engaged in meaningful

Figure 6: Skill development in a traditional classroom
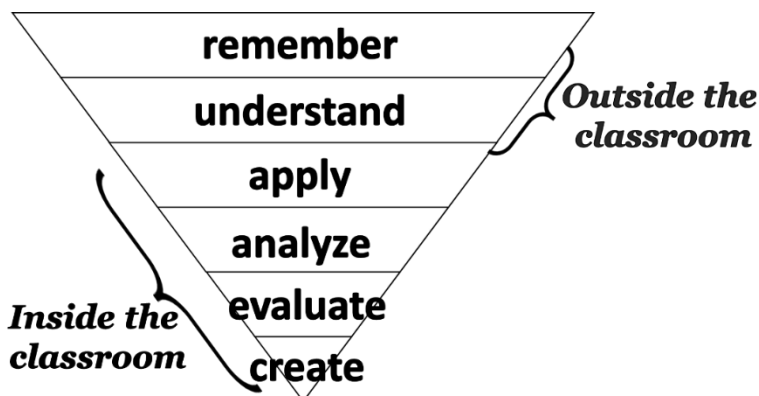
activities meant to develop their HOTs. The flipped classroom is presented in Figure 3.

Carstens and Sheehan (2014: 93) summarize flipped learning as:
- a means to increase interaction and personalized contact time between students and teachers;
- an environment where students take responsibility for their own learning;
- a classroom where the teacher is not the "sage on the stage" but "the guide on the side";
- a blending of direct instruction with constructivist learning;
- a classroom where students who are absent due to illness or extra-curricular activities such as athletics or field trips, don't get left behind;
- a class where content is permanently achieved for review or remediation;
- a class where all students are engaged in their learning;
- a place where all students can get a personalized education.

It can be assumed that learning will be deeper as students will become more responsible, whereas their interaction will be more meaningful. They will be actively involved in applying the knowledge learned at home in meaningful ways and get immediate feedback from both peers and teachers. Such a lesson will promote students talk and encourage critical thinking. Moreover, it will offer the possibility for learners to learn from one another.

The question one might ask himself/herself is how to flip a language classroom. There are a series of steps to be taken before using this model.
- identify where the flipped classroom model makes the most sense for your course;
- spend class time engaging students in application activities with feedback;
- clarify connections between inside and outside of class learning;
- adapt your materials for students to acquire course content in preparation of
- class;
- extend learning beyond class through individual and collaborative practice (https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/flipped-classroom).

While studying the possible application of the flipped model to an English language classroom, I have noticed the tendency language educators have to use different videos as a means allowing the language educators to flip their classroom. In her webinar on *The Flipped Classroom: The role TED and technology can play to get students speaking*, Hsu-Ping Tuan examines the way TED talks could be used in a language classroom and the way they enhance the students' language learning.

I decided to gradually implement this model in my teaching practice with first year students of Alecu Russo Bălți State University studying English as their first foreign language. The group of students consisted of 17 students, 3 male students and 14 female students. The questions I posed were the following:

- How shall I flip the classroom to make the language learning process more meaningful and motivational?
- How do students react to the flipped classroom model?

The main method applied was classroom observation and informal interactions. They allowed me to collect the data for analysis and discussion.

One of the most strategic decisions to be made in a language classroom is what exactly can be flipped. I thought that the flipped model will best suit to invert the traditional way of teaching grammar. Thus learners will be asked to study a specific grammar topic at home, and then in the classroom they will be engaged in some interactive activities where they will apply the knowledge learned at home.

I also decided to make my own videos as I thought learners will find it more easily to understand the material if they listened to somebody they know and trust. I have also decided to make videos short, so that learners manage to process the information. Consequently, I made a series of videos which I posted on my YouTube channel. It should be mentioned that the learners were encouraged to look for additional explanations either online or in grammar books.

The first designed activity can be said to only partially introduce the flipped model. I thought it would be appropriate to help learners get used to the new model. I created a video where imperatives were used (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7TXZVpFbNE). The learners were invited to write a dictation on it and reflect on the use of verbs. In the classroom they were asked to create their own presentations where the Imperative will be used.

This activity was later extended with another video on the same grammar topic (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tuQP1mUKaY). This time, its primary focus was to develop critical thinking and creativity at leaners. Again the learners were asked to watch the video. They were asked to reflect not only on the use of imperatives but also on the message in the video. In the classroom, the learners were engaged in activities related to the video watched at home.

The actual classroom flipping happened when I made videos covering specific grammar topics related to the present, past and future tenses in English. Some of the videos can be accessed by clicking the following links:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gzCALvJEFM,
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOYShK-tUak,
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ1opnITKXA,
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g92zc9LOSmk.

In the classroom, the students applied that knowledge gained at home. From my observation, students still preferred to be engaged in less interactive activities. Being used to doing exercises at home, they would willingly do grammar exercises in the classroom. However, when they were asked to engage in more interactive activities, they did it less willingly.

I have noticed that the students did not like to work collaboratively. They did not seem to have the collaborative and communicative skills well-developed. When faced with a problem which has risen in their groups, they would not look for solutions, but would instead start blaming one another. In addition, they were unable to organize their work so that it leads to success.

In my opinion, this can be the result of the instruction model they got used to at school. The students are not prepared to take responsibility for their own learning, instead they still expect the teacher to be in the centre of the instruction process. Consequently, the learners become insecure and less motivated to learn independently. Another problem resulting from the teacher-centred approach can be seen in the learners' inability to work collectively and to solve problems. From the made observations it can be concluded that high school in the majority of cases contributes little to the development of HOTs and learner autonomy. Thus, most of the learners seem to be unprepared to face the challenges the university academic context involves.

The topic of flipped classroom is worth investigating further. It should be seen as an alternative to traditional teacher-centred instruction, which can boost the learners' autonomy and motivation. This model can also contribute to the development of HOTs. It is true that applying this model is quite challenging and might be met with a certain degree of resistance from the part of the students and teachers. Yet, in the end, it can help develop the learners' 21st century skills. In addition, it also brings the fun element into the classroom, creating more motivational learning environments.

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